



EPA Fact Sheet:

# Libby Schools Update

EPA Information Center \* 501 Mineral Avenue, Libby, MT 59923 \*  
(406)293-6194

Fact Sheet Number 5

May 2001

## Asbestos in Libby Schools and Public Spaces

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) will be sampling schools and other public spaces for asbestos during the summer of 2001. The Agency will clean up areas where asbestos contamination is found at levels which are known to pose a risk to human health. EPA has done visual inspections of all the school yards in Libby. In addition, samples were collected from most walkways and play areas.

**EPA continues to request information about vermiculite in any form that was deposited at any of the schools for any use. This will help focus sampling efforts on specific properties at the schools that otherwise may not be sampled. Please call 293-6194 with information about vermiculite at schools.**

### Libby High School

A licensed and certified asbestos inspector inspected the school interior on January 22, 2000. The inspections included air sampling, dust sampling, and a visual walk through. The inspectors reviewed all previous AHERA\* (Asbestos Hazard Emergency Response Act) inspection documents. The interior inspection and review showed no asbestos problems.

Recently, EPA sampled the soil under the school tracks and on the football field. Three samples from the tracks showed vermiculite ore at a depth of between 2-6 inches and contained asbestos concentrations ranging from 3-8% asbestos by weight. The football field was also sampled for asbestos because of a rumor that vermiculite ore had been used to construct it. Three samples from the center of the football field showed no asbestos. Most recently, vermiculite was found around the perimeter of the track and covered.

EPA has concluded that there is not an immediate acute risk from the asbestos at the track but that it could present a management problem in the future such as when construction in the area disturbs the soil. The tracks are scheduled to be removed this summer and reconstructed over clean soil.

### Libby Middle School

A licensed and certified asbestos inspector inspected the school interior on January 23, 2000. The inspections included air sampling, dust sampling, and a visual walk through. The inspectors reviewed all previous AHERA\* inspection documents. The interior inspection and review showed no asbestos problems.

Recently, EPA sampled the soil under the track at each of the track curves and at the edges of the track at these four locations. Two samples were taken at the center of the track. Several samples were taken at other locations on the Middle School grounds. The four samples from the track showed between 0 and 2% asbestos by weight at a depth of 0-2 inches. At a depth of 2-24 inches, asbestos increased to between 2-8%.

Since the asbestos that EPA detected is all at depth and, in some cases, covered by the track, EPA concluded that there is not currently a risk of exposure. Like the high school, however, even buried asbestos can present long-term management problems during construction. The plans are to remove the Middle school track this summer and reconstruct it over clean soil.

### **Asa Wood Elementary**

A licensed and certified asbestos inspector inspected the school interior on January 23, 2000. The inspections included air sampling, dust sampling, and a visual walk through. The inspectors reviewed all previous AHERA\* inspection documents. The interior inspection and review showed no asbestos problems. Several school representatives suspected insulation was blown into the block walls. Insulation was not identified during the AHERA inspection and EPA could not verify the presence without performing destructive sampling.

Recently, EPA took samples at the playground and walkways. No vermiculite was reported or seen and no asbestos was detected in the samples.

### **McGrade Elementary**

A licensed and certified asbestos inspector inspected the school interior on January 23, 2000. The inspections included air sampling, dust sampling, and a visual walk through. The inspectors reviewed all previous AHERA\* inspection documents. The interior inspection and review showed no asbestos problems.

Recently, EPA took samples at the playground and walkways. No vermiculite was reported or seen and no asbestos was detected in the samples.

### **Plummer Elementary**

A licensed and certified asbestos inspector inspected the school interior on January 22, 2000. The inspections included air sampling, dust sampling, and a visual walk through. The inspectors reviewed all previous AHERA\* inspection documents. The interior inspection and review showed no asbestos problems.

Recently, EPA took seven samples at the former ice rink area on the south side of the school building beyond the bicycle rack. One sample showed asbestos levels of 5% at the surface as a result of vermiculite ore tailings that had been previously placed at that location. Although there are no other obvious problems, EPA is investigating the rest of the school grounds.

EPA has temporarily covered the area with sand and will remove the material and replace it with clean fill once the school year is over. Based on the results, EPA will take additional samples from the soccer area immediately east of the former skating pond.

### **Yaak School District**

A licensed and certified asbestos inspector inspected the school interior on **April 9, 10, 16 or 17, 2001**. The inspections included air sampling, dust sampling, and a visual walk through. The inspectors reviewed all previous AHERA\* inspection documents. The interior inspection and review showed no asbestos problems. No vermiculite was reported or seen outside and no asbestos was detected in the samples.

### **Fireman's Park**

EPA did not conduct air sampling at Fireman's Park. Soil samples taken recently from several areas around the Park showed <1% asbestos by weight, at one out of seven sampling locations. This result was in a sub-surface soil sample, at least 2 inches below the ground surface. No other areas of vermiculite were reported or seen. EPA will take more samples to better delineate any contamination in this area.

### **Lincoln Playground**

EPA did not conduct air sampling at this playground. No vermiculite was reported or seen and no asbestos was detected in four soil samples that were taken.

## **What does this all mean to me?**

If any immediate risk to school children is found, EPA will take immediate action to correct the problem by cleaning up contaminated soil. EPA will keep you up to date on the latest results and cleanup plans.

### **Depth of samples**

EPA is most concerned about soils which are contaminated at the surface or just below the surface where kids might kick up dust and be exposed to airborne asbestos fibers. If EPA finds an unacceptable level of asbestos at the surface of the soil, steps will be taken to cover it until school is out for the summer and then a permanent removal and soil replacement will occur in the summer.

### **Percent of asbestos by weight**

EPA is concerned about asbestos concentrations of 3-8% because exposure at these levels has resulted in asbestos related illness in other situations.

### **How do I know I was exposed at the high school or middle school tracks?**

EPA believes that the vermiculite ore was brought from the mine area and placed on the high school track in approximately 1973. Asphalt was placed on the track in approximately 1983 and an all weather surface put on in 1984. It is reasonable to assume that you were exposed to asbestos fibers if you were running on the track between 1973 and 1983 or before the asphalt running track was placed over the vermiculite.

### **If I believe my child or I have been exposed, what should I do?**

ATSDR and EPA recommend consulting your doctor or a public health official who specializes in asbestos exposure, as a good first step. You can call the Center for Asbestos Related Disease in Libby at 293-9274 for additional information. There are individual exposure factors which make it difficult to recommend a single course of action for everyone. Although another round of medical screening will occur this summer, because of the long latency period for asbestos-related diseases, these screening tools are generally not effective for screening children.

### **\* AHERA**

AHERA is the Asbestos Hazard Emergency Response Act. All school AHERA inspections comply with U.S. EPA Title 2 Section 203., 15 U.S.C. 2643. The rules and regulations adopted pursuant to the act are provided in 40 CFR part 763.80 et.-seq., asbestos containing materials in schools final rule and notice, dated Oct. 30, 1987.

## **EPA Contacts**

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## For More Information

Community members are encouraged to stop by the EPA Information Center in downtown Libby at 501 Mineral Avenue or contact any of the team members listed below. The Information Center is open weekdays from 8:30 am - 5:00 pm and is a good place to get more information, ask questions or express concerns. The phone number is (406) 293-6194.

***Stop by anytime!***